

### Book Reviews for Volume III:

Retired Navy Commander David D. Bruhn provides everything you ever wanted to know about U.S. minesweeping operations in the Vietnam War in *Wooden Ships and Iron Men: The U.S. Navy's Coastal and Inshore Minesweepers, and the Minecraft that Served in Vietnam, 1953–1976* (Heritage Books, 343 pp., \$34, paper).

This is Volume III in Bruhn's "Wooden Ships and Iron Men" series of books on Navy coastal minesweeping operations beginning in 1941. The two previous volumes focused on World War II and the Korean War. In this volume Bruhn, who served in the Navy from 1977–2001, looks at the work done by two dozen Navy coastal minesweepers from 1953–76. In addition to ferreting out mines and performing other operations in Vietnam, the ships' crews also searched for downed aircraft, sunken ships, and lost munitions off the U.S. coasts, in the Caribbean, and throughout Asia.

Most of the book deals with U.S. minesweeping and other sea operations in Vietnam. The latter included patrolling the coast to prevent war supplies from being smuggled in by sea to the enemy. Most of the work in Vietnam, however, consisted of often-dangerous minesweeping ops along the 1,200-mile coast of South Vietnam and on the vast network of waterways in the Mekong Delta and other rivers, including the Long Tau, the Perfume, and the Cua Viet.

"Despite a concerted, multi-year Viet Cong effort to kill American mine warriors, sink their [ships], and prevent merchant ships from delivering their precious military cargos to the capital, the enemy never succeeded," Vietnam War naval historian Edward J. Marolda says in the book's Foreword.

The book, Marolda notes, "will stand for years as a standard reference on the wartime and peacetime contributions of the U.S. Navy's mine warriors and their sturdy ships."

Marc Leepson, Books Editor, *The VVA Veteran*

(The national magazine of Vietnam Veterans of America)

Books in Brief on the Web (<http://vvabooks.wordpress.com>), April 26, 2012



Of interest to naval historians and students of the Vietnam conflict, this interesting volume provides a detailed history of U.S. Navy coastal mine sweeping vessels and their contributions to Navy operations around the world and especially in the coastal waterways and river shipping routes during the war in Southeast Asia. Beginning with thematic chapters on the design and construction of various types of craft, the volume proceeds chronologically, documenting assignments such as search operations in the Caribbean, the vessels in operation in support of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, and Vietnam operations. The volume includes numerous tables and black and white photographs as well as appendices documenting squadrons and their captains, unit citations and sailors killed or missing in combat operations. Bruhn is a retired Navy commander.

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## Book Review for Volume II:

Wooden ships in a modern navy sounds like a misprint, but the Navy did indeed build hundreds of wooden ships for service in World War II and retain some for action in the Korean conflict. Their main role was to clear mine fields, but they also served as scouts, searched for enemy subs, and transported troops.

In the beginning, the Navy tried to meet its needs for vessels of this type by converting fishing vessels and large yachts—they were readily available and had the wooden hulls needed to protect against magnetic mines. One of these converted vessels played a major role in the first combat of WWII, spotting a Japanese midget submarine that was later sunk by the destroyer *Ward* on 7 December 1941, just outside Pearl Harbor.

Sensing that requisitioned boats would not meet its total needs, the Navy turned to American shipyards with orders to turn out 561 wooden-hulled ships each 136 feet long. This was the largest production run for any ship ordered by the Navy in the war.

Originally conceived as most suitable for service in the vicinity of U.S. Navy yards and bases, their utility extended far beyond the shores of the United States. These motor minesweepers took part in U.S. landings in Normandy, Iwo Jima, Sicily, Anzio, Guam, Leyte, Okinawa, and in numerous other operations.

Illustrative of their careers was the coastal minesweeper *Industry*, which helped to clear mines from the waters off of Okinawa in March 1945 and was also called upon to help locate sunken Japanese midget submarines. She fought off Japanese air raids and managed to survive a typhoon in September 1945.

However, when a much stronger storm hit in October (Typhoon Louise) with 80-knot winds and 35-foot waves, she was driven ashore, overturned, and battered. Her crew survived but the ship was lost and was decommissioned in December 1945.

The end of hostilities, in August 1945, did not mark the end of actions for the small minesweepers. They were heavily involved in clearing the mines (many originally placed by the U.S. Navy) that blocked access to ports in Japan, East China, and around the mouth of the Yangtze River.

When the Korean War broke out, the Navy used 16 of these WWII ships to clear off the Korean coast and this often exposed them to shelling from artillery based on the mainland. The role of these ships was recognized through the award of 124 battle stars, seven Presidential Unit Citations, and seven Navy Unit Commendations.

The author presents an impressive level of detail about these boats and their service via an interesting text and numerous appendices. This is an authoritative book about a generally unpublished service of the U.S. Navy.

Robert Calvert, Jr., *The Dispatch and Book Reviews of the Company of Military Historians*, Spring 2011

## **Book Review for Volume I:**

They endured the most dangerous conditions in the world, and did a job no one else could do. The 65 ocean minesweepers worked through most of the Cold War, searching for ordnance, rescuing the lost, and getting up close and personal with a variety of tense situations in regions of conflict. They picked up atomic weapons dropped in the Mediterranean near Spain, assisted in Apollo spacecraft recovery and stood ready during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Bruhn, whose experience with minesweepers is long, explains how these ships came to be in the first place, how they were staffed and run, and why they were so adaptable. He describes operations in detail, including the aforesaid Apollo detail, the role of the reserve force, and the last days of these noble and busy ships and people in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm.

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